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The Tolerant Leviathan: Hobbes and the Paradox of Liberalism

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For many contemporary liberals, toleration has become liberalism's defining characteristic, with individual rights being maintained more or less unconditionally. Because Hobbes stressed so emphatically the conditional character of nearly all individual rights and their dependence on sovereign authority, he is typically viewed by liberals as an absolutist who was indifferent, if not hostile, to toleration. This typical view, however, neglects liberalism's own absolutism, which necessarily supports and qualifies toleration. Hobbes's liberalism is paradoxical, but the paradox of Hobbes's liberalism not only reflects, but also helps to clarify, the paradox of liberalism per se.

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Introduction

According to many contemporary liberals, toleration has become liberalism's defining characteristic, or most fundamental principle. Although there are obvious grounds for this supposition, it brings with it certain paradoxes, if not contradictions, since liberals repeatedly find themselves in a position where some intolerance is required. Liberals justifiably oppose fascism, communism, radical Islam, and so on with words, and if necessary with the force of law or arms. In doing so, they oppose what threatens the regime of liberalism itself. But fascists, communists, and radical Muslims likewise can claim that their own intolerances serve to protect their own regimes. We may sense that there is

a crucial difference in the case of liberalism, but it is difficult to articulate that difference without recourse to political principles apart from toleration.

Help in sorting out the paradoxes surrounding liberal toleration can be found in considering that most paradoxical of liberal thinkers, Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes's clear emphasis on securing the authority of sovereign over subjects has led commentators to describe him as a "supporter of absolutism" and "authoritarian rule."¹ But Hobbes sought to secure the greatest possible scope for private liberty, or as we would now call it, toleration, which requires in the first place the peace and security that only a sovereign authority can allow. Hobbes is revealing of the nature of liberalism because liberalism always faces an internal struggle between toleration and absolutism—principles of the regime that are enforced by the state and allow no breach or higher appeal. Or, to be more precise, liberal toleration is always dependent on, and therefore limited by, liberalism's own absolutism. Liberal rights are always qualified. For Hobbesian liberalism, toleration is desirable, and indeed a necessary feature of an enlightened society. But it is emphatically conditional. For the typical contemporary liberal account of toleration, the absolutism that qualifies toleration remains in the background, if not completely hidden, whereas Hobbes never lets us forget it. The liberal view that looks askance at Hobbes wishes to claim toleration as an unconditional right. But the inevitable untenability of such unconditional rights allows us to see that Hobbes's liberalism is not so much opposed to contemporary liberalism as it is more clear-sighted about the necessary relation between toleration and absolutism and about the secondary or contingent value of toleration.

Hobbes's status as a liberal thinker has long been controversial, to say the least. While many have considered Hobbes's political thought the very antithesis of liberalism,² a number of scholars have argued that Hobbes was a sort of precursor, if not the founder, of liberalism.³ Still other scholars split the difference,

1. Raymond Gettell, *History of Political Thought* (New York: The Century Co., 1925); Andrew Hacker, *Political Theory: Philosophy, Ideology, Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

2. Hume claimed that "Hobbes's politics are fitted only to promote tyranny." See Hume, *The History of England*, 6 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1778] 1983), VI:153. More recently, Sheldon Wolin has called Hobbes not only an apologist for despotism, but a prime contributor to a distinctly modern "culture of despotism." See Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hobbes and the Culture of Despotism," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 9–36; cf. Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab and Eerna Hilfstein (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, [1938] 1996); Charles D. Tarlton, "The Despotical Doctrine of Hobbes, Part I: The Liberalization of Leviathan," *History of Political Thought* 22 (2001): 587–618.

3. Two influential readings of Hobbes in the twentieth century identified Hobbes as the theoretical founder of liberalism understood as bourgeois society: see Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936); C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes and Locke* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962). Yet most scholars who have attempted to establish some positive link between Hobbes and

maintaining that, although Hobbes began from some distinctly liberal premises, the conclusions he draws were ultimately hostile to liberal principles.⁴ But even, or especially, those scholars who wish to defend Hobbes's liberalism have tended to neglect the thorny question of his teaching on toleration.⁵ For whatever liberal features we may identify in Hobbes, it is the view that Hobbes was indifferent, or even hostile, to the principle of toleration in particular that most detracts from the case that he was a liberal. Consequently, those who do view toleration as liberalism's most basic principle can be too quick in rejecting Hobbes's liberalism. Hence, Judith Shklar says that "liberalism does not in principle have to depend on specific religious or philosophical systems of thought. It does not

liberalism have presented Hobbes as some sort of proto-liberal, or as a thinker who, although not himself liberal, helped to lay the groundwork for genuine liberal philosophies in such thinkers as Locke and Spinoza. See Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 204–205; John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995), 66–67; Alan Ryan, "Liberalism," in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 291–311.

4. Susan Moller Okin says: "Though Hobbes was no liberal in his conclusions, advocating an absolute rather than restrained state, many of his most important ideas—including original individual equality and freedom—became central tenets of liberal theory," "Humanist Liberalism," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 257. Benjamin Barber says: "Liberals rightly pall at the idea of Hobbes as a liberal predecessor because his fear of anarchy leads him to embrace an authoritarian conception of the state incompatible with limited government. Yet inasmuch as the state serves a liberty the natural condition imperils, Hobbes does share a crucial liberal premise: that the legitimating political principle is the service of individual self-preservation, which is the sine qua non of liberty," "Liberal Democracy and the Cost of Consent" in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, 261. Deborah Baumgold describes the "paradox of Hobbism" as lying "in its derivation of absolutist conclusions from liberal-individualist premises of natural right, consent, and individual self-interest," *Hobbes's Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 133–34.

5. Two notable exceptions are Alan Ryan and Richard Tuck. Their cases are powerful, but largely "circumstantial," examining such things as Hobbes's contemporaries' view of his support for toleration and the position he took on contemporary political policy regarding religion. See Alan Ryan, "Hobbes, Toleration, and the Inner Life," in *The Nature of Political Theory*, ed. David Miller and Larry Siedentop (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 197–218; Alan Ryan, "A More Tolerant Hobbes?" in *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Richard Tuck, "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 153–71. And where Ryan has tried to place Hobbes's views of toleration within his political philosophy as a whole, he nevertheless feels compelled to say that "it would be absurd to call Hobbes a liberal," ("Liberalism," 298), owing to the fact that Hobbesian toleration is conditional and not maintained "as a matter of right"; see Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 233. I will return to Ryan's account of Hobbes below. For a rebuttal to Tuck's case, see James Farr, "Hobbes and the Politics of Biblical Interpretation" in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, 172–96. For related treatments of Hobbes as an "individualist," see George Kateb, "Hobbes and the Irrationality of Politics," *Political Theory* 17 (1989): 355–91; Richard Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality, and Chastened Politics* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993); Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); David Van Mill, *Liberty, Rationality, and Agency in Hobbes's Leviathan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); cf. Richard Boyd "Thomas Hobbes and the Perils of Pluralism," *Journal of Politics* 63 (2001): 392–413. On the link between individualism and absolutism in Hobbes, see Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 28.

have to choose among them as long as they do not reject toleration, which is why Hobbes is not the father of liberalism." Hobbes's intentions are "authoritarian," and only a "convoluted genealogy of liberalism" could identify him with it.⁶

The aim of this essay is two-fold. First, I seek to defend Hobbes's status as a liberal philosopher by showing that he was a proponent of a liberal politics of toleration, holding a view that is not as far from Locke's undeniably liberal doctrine of toleration as it may at first appear. My second and more fundamental aim is to use the obvious paradox of Hobbes's liberalism to cast light on the less obvious paradox of liberalism in whatever form, and on the limitations of any principle of toleration.

The Conditionality of Rights

One of the chief exponents of the view that Hobbes was a friend of toleration, Alan Ryan, nevertheless concludes that "it would be absurd to call Hobbes a liberal." Ryan argues that for Hobbes, "toleration is not argued for on principle, but as a utilitarian measure; if toleration is unsafe it must be dropped—public order trumps any notion of a right of free speech. Among rational men toleration would be safe, and when safe a very good thing."⁷ Because toleration is conditional (on its being allowed safely), there is no *right* to toleration (freedom of speech, conscience, etc.). Hobbes, in fact, inveighs against granting unconditional freedoms, or rights, to the people. Thus, Ryan says, Hobbes was "deeply hostile to supposed *rights* of toleration. It is this that marks him as a non-liberal. The advocacy or denial of toleration as a matter of right divides the liberal and non-liberal more sharply than anything else."⁸

Ryan's view has become the common sense liberal view. But there is more than one way of conceiving of liberal principles. When Ryan says that Hobbes argued for toleration as a matter of utility rather than principle, he neglects the fact that for Hobbes utility was identical to principle.⁹ Or, to state Hobbes's position more adequately, toleration represents a political principle for Hobbes precisely because, in Ryan's words, "among rational men [it] would be safe, and when safe a very good thing." Toleration represents a Hobbesian principle, not because it is unconditional, but because it is intrinsic to a rational, or well-ordered society. That Hobbes recognizes this principle is evident in the fact that, as I will argue below, toleration, that is, the preservation of the greatest scope of

6. Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, 24.

7. Alan Ryan, "A More Tolerant Hobbes?" 58.

8. Alan Ryan, "Liberalism," 291–311.

9. Cf. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985): 247; and with Patrick Neal, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 192–93.

individual freedom possible, is for the Hobbesian sovereign a matter of natural law or duty (although, as we will see, this does not mean that it is unconditionally required).

Yet this does present a paradox. How can Hobbes's political philosophy be directed to a tolerant regime, and yet be hostile to the granting of unconditional freedoms, or rights? In order to resolve this paradox, it is necessary to step back and consider Hobbes's teaching on human freedom in general.

According to Hobbes, the condition of absolute human liberty, of absolute individual liberty, is the state of nature, which is a war of all against all. Here each human being has the absolute right to do as he wills. Hobbes states: "amongst masterless men, there is perpetual war of every man against his neighbor, no inheritance to transmit to the son or expect from the father, no propriety of goods or lands, no security, but a full and absolute liberty in every particular man."¹⁰ The state of absolute individual liberty is the worst possible human state. The rest of Hobbes's political teaching seems to follow more or less directly from this premise, and could easily and reasonably lead one to conclude that the chief object of attack for Hobbes's doctrine is individual liberty, and therefore that Hobbes allows no place for toleration. For in political society, citizens can claim few freedoms as a limit on the power and right of the state. There are few liberties the state may not legitimately take away. Subjects can claim no inviolable right to be tolerated in even the narrowest sphere of activity. Hobbes sees the threat of a reversion to the state of nature lurking in claims against the legitimate scope of state power. Individuals who enter political society, Hobbes teaches, necessarily alienate nearly all of their natural rights or liberties.¹¹

The goal of political society, however, is not the alienation of natural liberties *per se*. That is merely the necessary means to securing that degree of liberty that is possible for human beings. Human beings are absolutely free in the state of nature in the sense that they have the absolute right to do whatever they are able. But in the state of nature, they are *unable* to satisfy in any considerable measure their appetites, including especially their appetite for mere life. They are unable to obtain what "men call felicity," that is, "[c]ontinual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say continual prospering."¹² Human beings in their natural state cannot prosper continually; life is poor and short. There are external restraints on their ability to satisfy their appetites, and in that respect they are radically unfree, if not lacking right, in the state of nature. Human beings agree to enter into political society because it is only there that they are free, in any practical measure, to satisfy their appetites.

10. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1688*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, [1651] 1994), XXI: 8.

11. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI.

12. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, VI: 58.

Hobbes defines a “free-man” as “he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do is not hindered to do what he has a will to do.”¹³ Hobbes does not tire of stressing that a subject’s freedom is limited by the law. But his freedom “to do what he has a will to do” is far greater in civil society than in the state of nature.¹⁴

The goal of the state itself is peace and security for the individuals who created it. But human beings desire peace and security not only their own sake, but also for the sake of satisfying their own endless appetites, or of doing as they like, as they were not free to do in the state of nature. The “continual fear and danger of violent death” is the “worst of all” features of the state of nature. But freedom from that fear and danger is the keystone in a list of goods which that fear and danger prevent from arising, including industry, agriculture, “commodious building,” arts, letters, and society.¹⁵ After defining the “office of the sovereign” as “the procuration of the safety of the people,” Hobbes immediately adds: “But by safety here is not meant a bare preservation, but also all other contentments of life, which every man by lawful industry, without danger or hurt to the commonwealth, shall acquire to himself.”¹⁶ It is the duty of the sovereign to secure “commodity of living” for the people, which according to Hobbes “consisteth in liberty and wealth. By liberty I mean, that there be no prohibition without necessity of anything to any man, which was lawful to him in the law of nature; that is to say, *that there be no restraint of natural liberty, but what is*

13. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI: 2.

14. Hobbes states: “For the use of laws (which are but rules authorized) is not to bind the people from all voluntary actions, but to direct and keep them in such a motion as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness, or indiscretion, as hedges are set, not to stop travellers, but to keep them in the way” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXX: 21) Locke elaborates the same principle this way: “[L]aw, in its true notion, is not so much the limitation as the direction of a free and intelligent agent to his proper interest, and prescribes no farther than is for the general good of those under that law: could they be happier without it, the law, as an useless thing, would of itself vanish; and that ill deserves the name of confinement which hedges us in only from bogs and precipices. So that, however it may be mistaken, the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom: for in all the states of created beings capable of laws, where there is no law, there is no freedom: for liberty is, to be free every man to do what he lists,” John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett [1689–90] 1980), 57.

15. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIII: 9; Mary G. Dietz remarks: “Hobbes’s subject is less an abject creature confined within a system of public rules than a prosperous and contributing member of a society complete with commercial, cultural, and intellectual achievements. The Hobbesian commonwealth, to paraphrase Plato, is a luxurious city, not a city of pigs (or state police). Fear may help explain submission, but it does not adequately capture the lively and prosperous polity Hobbes imagined,” “Hobbes’s Subject as Citizen,” in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, 95.

16. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXX: 1; And again in *De Cive*: “Now all the duties of rulers are contained in this one sentence, the safety [*salus*] of the people is the supreme law. . . . But by safety must be understood, not the sole preservation of life in what condition soever, but in order to its happiness. For to this end did men freely assemble themselves and institute a government, that they might, as much as their human condition would afford, live delightfully [*iucundissime*]”; Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive: The Latin Version*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon Press [1642] 1983), XIII: 2, 4.

necessary for the good of the commonwealth."¹⁷ In one sense, therefore, the state of nature is the worst state for human beings, the state we flee. Nature is the problem, the artificial Leviathan the solution. Yet in another sense (and to put it in un-Hobbesian terms), nature provides the standard for political society and thus guides its reasonable governance.

With all this said, however, the fact remains that Hobbes consumes an overwhelming amount of rhetorical energy in impressing upon the reader the near absolute right of the sovereign over the lives, or more precisely the actions, of citizens once political society has been established. The sovereign has the right, according to Hobbes, to censor speech and writing, to ban any associations he sees fit, and to demand conformity to a prescribed mode of worship and profession of faith.¹⁸ Hobbes allows very few rights to be unconditional, because an unconditional right for Hobbes is one that literally cannot be surrendered under any conditions. We cannot, for example, surrender our right to private judgment, what Hobbes calls "conscience" (as distinguished from speech or expression), on matters of theology, no matter how sharp the knife that is put to our throat.¹⁹ Nor can we surrender the right to defend ourselves from the state's executioner, given that fear of death, that is, violent death, is the single most powerful natural passion.²⁰

But this is not to say that these few absolute rights are the only freedoms to be allowed citizens by the Hobbesian sovereign. On the contrary, "[t]he greatest liberty of subjects," according to Hobbes, "dependeth on the silence of the law. . . . In cases where the sovereign has prescribed no rule, there the subject hath the liberty to do or forbear, according to his own discretion."²¹ Unconditional freedoms are the least part of the freedoms to be enjoyed. Yet the precise scope of this greatest part of the subjects' liberty is contingent on the safety with which those freedoms can be allowed.

Because peace and security are the *sine qua non* of any fruitful liberty whatever, the Hobbesian bill of rights is extremely short. For circumstances may arise in which the safety of the people requires that those liberties be suspended. Such freedoms are always provisional: "If a monarch or sovereign assembly grant a liberty to all or any of his subjects, which grant standing, he is disabled to provide for their safety, the grant is void, unless he directly renounce or transfer the sovereignty to another."²² Circumstances vary from time to time and place to

17. Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law: Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [1655] 1994), XXVIII: 4; emphasis added.

18. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI, 37–38.

19. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVII: 20; Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, XXV: 3.

20. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI: 11.

21. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI: 18.

22. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI: 20.

place, however constant they may appear for long stretches of time. The sovereign must be allowed discretion, and in his judgment he is answerable to none but God.²³ For if subjects claim the right to gainsay the sovereign judgment, they find themselves back in a state of war.

Even liberal proponents of a lengthy bill of rights can be forced to admit that the vast majority of individual rights hold only for the most part, not unconditionally. Abraham Lincoln admitted the need of the public safety taking precedence over individual liberties, yet this does not mean that he did not view liberal freedoms as a matter of principle.²⁴ The fact that liberal freedoms are not held unconditionally does suggest, however, that there is a more fundamental principle for liberals—peace, safety, life. Hobbes saw this priority clearly. And although he presents the matter in a different frame, Locke saw the same priority. Locke also saw that this means that limits to the legitimate use of state power cannot be set in advance. The exercise of discretion is unavoidable. Thus, Locke allows the executive the “power to act according to discretion, for the public good, without the prescription of the law, and sometimes even against it.”²⁵ No line can be drawn circumscribing liberties that circumstances may not require to be crossed.

Where Hobbes differs from Locke, and from most of the liberal tradition that followed, is in his claim that it is imprudent to try to draw that line (by law), which one can know in advance may have to be crossed. Drawing such a line amounts to foreswearing publicly the use of some sovereign power. “From whence it comes to pass,” Hobbes warns, “that, when the exercise of the power laid by is for the public safety to be resumed, it hath the resemblance of an unjust act, which disposeth great numbers of men (when occasion is presented) to rebel.”²⁶ Hobbes recommends not binding the sovereign by law. Locke allows the executive to act outside, and even against, the law. The discretion allowed in

23. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXX: 1.

24. In defending the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus during the Civil War, Lincoln stated that “the Constitution is not, in its application, in all respects the same, in cases of rebellion or invasion involving the public safety, as it is in time of profound peace and public security”; Abraham Lincoln, *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 280. Article I, Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution states that “The privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it.” Compare also Rawls’s comments in *A Theory of Justice*: “Assume that tolerant sects have the right not to tolerate the intolerant in at least one circumstance, namely, when they sincerely and with reason believe that intolerance [i.e. their own intolerance] is necessary for their own security. This right follows readily enough since, as the original position defined, each would agree to the right of self-preservation. Justice does not require that men must stand idly by while others destroy the basis of their existence. . . . This situation presents a practical dilemma which philosophy alone cannot resolve. Whether the liberty of the intolerant should be limited to preserve freedom under a just constitution depends on the circumstances”; *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971): 218, 219.

25. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 160.

26. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIX: 3.

restricting liberties is the same. Hobbes's recommendation has the virtue of being more honest or forthright, but that is not why he recommends it. Rather, he fears the threat to the public safety that may result when the public sees the sovereign acting illegally and hence (the people will assume) illegitimately. Locke might respond that it is easier to get forgiveness than permission, and that such laws are required in the first place for the people to submit willingly to the public authority. But that is a question of strategy for the same goal: establishing the maximum liberty compatible with a secure public authority. Regardless of the feasibility of Hobbes's alternative strategy, it does not signal a lesser desire to preserve the liberties of the people.

Owing to a related rationale, "liberty" was not the rallying cry for Hobbes that it was to become under Locke's influence. If Hobbes was a liberal, he was not a "live free or die!" liberal, since the dead enjoy no liberty whatever.²⁷ Hobbes is indeed wary of "liberty" as a political rally cry, out of a concern that it, like all political rallying cries, can easily align itself with the spirit of rebellion and civil war. Rally cries tend to make one forget that violent death is the worst evil, that nothing is worth dying for. The noble is the enemy of the good. Even political appeals to liberty are therefore risky. So, paradoxical though it may be, it is precisely as a friend of liberty that Hobbes stresses obedience and sovereign right instead of liberty.

Indeed, in the Epistle Dedicatory to *Leviathan*, Hobbes presents his doctrine as a middle road with respect to liberty: "In a way beset with those that contend, on one side for too great liberty, and on the other side for too much authority, 'tis hard to pass between the points of both unwounded." In the Latin version of *Leviathan*, he goes on to say, "But I see no reason why either side would be angry with me. For I do but magnify as much as I can the civil power, which anyone who possesses it wishes to be as great as possible." This leaves two obvious questions: How is magnifying the civil power as much as he can (however much that may be) not simply to side with those contending for "too much authority"? And how should such magnification appease the friends of liberty in the least? The answer lies in the fact that civil power for Hobbes is not identical to civil authority. The civil power is indeed to be "unlimited."²⁸ But the *scope* or authority of that power, that is, its legitimate end or purpose, has been narrowed or limited by Hobbes to an unprecedented extent. The sovereign's unlimited power is for the sake of

27. The same goes for Locke, despite his much greater emphasis on liberty. Locke parts from Hobbes in emphasizing liberty, but he does so owing to the more fundamental concern, which he shares with Hobbes, for preservation. Speaking of the state of war, Locke says: "No body can desire to have me in his absolute power, unless it be to compel me by force to that which is against the Right of my Freedom, i.e. to make me a slave. To be free from such force is the only security of my preservation: and reason bids me look on him, as an Enemy to my Preservation, who would take away that Freedom, which is a hedge to it" (Locke, *Second Treatise*, 17).

28. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI: 7.

achieving his extremely limited end; beyond that end, he has no business or interest. Such is liberal absolutism.

Thus, Hobbes is far from unleashing the sovereign to do as he pleases through his doctrine of unlimited sovereign power. This is further emphasized, and emphasized as a matter of principle, by Hobbes's instructions to the sovereign that the severe limitation on the purpose of his office is a matter of natural law. Hobbesian natural law does not involve a moral obligation in the sense of a duty to do something regardless of whether it profits oneself. On the contrary, Hobbesian natural laws are "conclusions and theorems concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defense" of oneself.²⁹ Where some "theorem" does not conduce to preservation, it is invalid. When Hobbes instructs the sovereign in natural law, he is advising him on how best to preserve his rule. The sovereign will best preserve his rule by preserving the greatest sphere of individual liberty that is compatible with civil peace.³⁰

Hobbes is indeed the father of the liberal philosophy of limited government, understood as government existing for an extremely limited purpose. This can be more readily seen by contrasting his account of law with Aristotle's. According to Aristotle, the law represents an entire way of life. There is no presumed arena of individual liberty outside the guidance of the law. Thus, "what [the law] does not command, it forbids."³¹ According to Hobbes, however, as we have seen, subjects are free to do whatever they please in any area not explicitly addressed by the law: "since all the motion and actions of the citizens have never been circumscribed by law, nor can be circumscribed because of their variety, it is necessary that the things that are neither commanded nor prohibited be almost infinite; and each can do them or not at his own discretion."³² These are "that part of natural right which is allowed and left to the citizens by the civil laws." That is, they are that part of each man's freedom left over from the state of nature, and in some sense unleashed owing to the civil laws. Natural rights should be limited

29. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XV: 41.

30. Spinoza follows Hobbes by recommending free speech this way: "It is true that [sovereigns] can by right hold as enemies all who do not agree with them absolutely in everything, but we are not now discussing what is their right but what is useful to them"; Benedictus de Spinoza, *Opera quotquot reperta sunt*, ed. J. van Vloten and J. P. N. Land (The Hague: Nijhoff [1670] 1882), 239; my translation. Spinoza, unlike Hobbes, favored democracy over kingship. Hobbes favored kingship because, he argued, in kingship the interest of the sovereign and that of the subjects most closely coincide (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIX: 4), although in *De Cive* he admits that his argument on behalf of monarchy is "the one thing in this book not demonstrated but posited probably" (Hobbes, *De Cive*, 21; my translation). However that may be, as Isaiah Berlin points out, "there is no necessary connexion between individual liberty and democratic rule," and that such liberty "is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy, or at any rate with the absence of self-government" see Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 130, 129; more on which below.

31. Aristotle, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. I. Bywater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), 1138a7; my translation.

32. Hobbes, *De Cive*, XIII: 15; my translation.

only insofar as they are harmful—harmful to the public safety, rather than to one's soul.³³ Hobbes states: "it is contrary to the duty of those who rule and have authority to make law that there be more laws than conduces to the good of the citizens and civic body." As for the "harmless liberties" of the citizens, these the "rulers are obligated to preserve for their citizens by the natural law." It is a matter of natural law, because it is dangerous to encroach on the private lives of the citizens any further than is necessary.³⁴

The Scope of Toleration and the Progress of Enlightenment

But how great did Hobbes think that sphere of "harmless liberties" was or could be? Perhaps part of what prevents Hobbes from seeming a true liberal is that he thought that sphere far smaller than contemporary liberals do. Thus, even if we grant Alan Ryan's contention that "Hobbes contributes to the growth of toleration by making religious conformity no more than a 'police matter,'"³⁵ does Hobbes not also indicate in many places the need, even though as a "police matter," to censor and control matters that we today take for granted as basic (and harmless) rights? Does not Hobbes, for example, often suggest the need for political censorship in religious doctrine and worship? Since, as Hobbes says, disorders and civil wars "are most often generated by differences of doctrine and intellectual wrangling, there must be some restraint, in the form of punishment, on those who teach, in books or sermons, things whose teachings the laws of the prince or republic prohibit."³⁶

This quotation leads us to still deeper waters. Does Hobbes not indicate that the sovereign may and even should control, not merely a greater sphere of private *action* than a true liberal ought, but also private *opinion*? Does Hobbes not, in other words, ignore the basic liberal distinction between legitimate government regulation of actions and illegitimate regulation of opinion? Since, as he writes, "it is evident that all voluntary actions have a beginning and necessarily depend on the will, and the will to do or not to do depends on the opinion each man has formed of the good or evil, the reward or penalty to follow from doing or not doing the thing; so that every man's actions are governed by his opinions," it follows "by necessary and evident inference, that it is utterly essential to the common peace that certain opinions not be put before the citizens."³⁷

In response, we must begin by making Hobbes's position appear more puzzling, and perhaps even contradictory. For Hobbes does distinguish

33. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XL: 2; XLVI: 37.

34. Cf. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 19.

35. Ryan, "A More Tolerant Hobbes," 21.

36. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Latin Appendix, II: 30.

37. Hobbes, *De Cive*, VI: 11.

emphatically between the regulation of actions and the regulation of opinions or thoughts. Thus, Hobbes condemns as an error the view that seeks “to extend the power of the law, which is the rule of actions only, to the very thoughts and consciences of men, by examination and inquisition of what they hold, notwithstanding the conformity of their speech and actions. By which men are either punished for answering the truth of their thoughts, or constrained to answer an untruth for fear of punishment.”³⁸ Yet this statement from *Leviathan* does not in fact contradict the statement quoted above from *De Cive* VI. *De Cive* VI does not recommend the attempt to coerce subjects to hold certain opinions. Hobbes repeatedly insists, as we noted above, that belief literally cannot be compelled by any degree of force. Nor does *De Cive* VI recommend coercing disingenuous professions of faith, which may often be possible but is certainly foolish. It advises only that “certain opinions not be put before the citizens.” It is concerned, that is, with stifling the *expression* of these opinions, that is, with an action, and only with expressions of opinion that pose a threat of rebellion or civil war. Locke advises no less (and possibly more) in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, when he states: “First, no opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate.”³⁹

This may not yet be seen as an adequately liberal defense of Hobbes, insofar as his position still seems to recommend the illiberal practice of censorship. But there are at least two ways to curb the expression of politically dangerous opinions. The first and most obvious means is through legal censorship. Hobbes (along with Locke) is doubtless of the opinion that legal censorship is preferable to civil war, and therefore permissible where necessary. As I argued in the last section, this is not *ipso facto* an illiberal doctrine. But it would be preferable if such censorship were not necessary. That is, it would be preferable if politically dangerous opinions did not exist to be expressed, or if the people were transformed in such a way that politically dangerous opinions could not take root.

Legal censorship would be made unnecessary on the basis of what David Johnston calls Hobbes’s “politics of cultural transformation,” culminating in popular enlightenment.⁴⁰ Enlightenment liberalism as a whole, that is, liberalism in its original form, did not suppose that liberal institutions could be firmly grounded without a transformation in the opinions of the people. That is the political significance of the idea of enlightenment. Contemporary liberals who suppose that liberalism requires treating all opinions with strict neutrality and refraining

38. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVI: 37; Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, XXV: 3.

39. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Hackett [1689] 1983), 49.

40. David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

from any manner of censorship have the benefit of working with opinions that have already been somehow transformed by the Enlightenment. Contemporary liberalism can think itself neutral in this way because the horizon of popular opinion has already been significantly liberalized. Hobbes saw the work yet to be done, and thus more readily appears illiberal to today's "neutrality" liberals.

Hobbes could not have expected the required transformation to take place overnight: "The multitude [*vulgus*] is educated little by little."⁴¹ This raises the question of what aspects of Hobbes's presentation might be meant to apply to a society in need of, or at an intermediate stage of, that transformation. What aspects of his presentation might be understood as being of merely temporary relevance? Could it be that Hobbes's more "illiberal" recommendations (such as censorship and requiring the teaching of *Leviathan*⁴²) are meant to liberalize an illiberal society and are meant to apply chiefly to illiberal, or not yet fully liberal, society? It is true that Hobbes says that "seeing a commonwealth is but one person, it ought also to exhibit but one worship, which then it doth when it commandeth it to be exhibited by private men publicly."⁴³ But is that his goal? Ought a sovereign to require public worship in the best circumstances, where enlightenment has had its full effect on the minds or opinions of the citizens?

Hobbes immediately raises an alternative possibility to "public worship": "where many sorts of worship are allowed, proceeding from the different religions of private men, it cannot be said there is any public worship, nor that the commonwealth is of any religion at all." This latter possibility, the legitimacy and moderation of which is today taken for granted, once was, as Hobbes here makes clear, a radical and dubious proposition. To have no publicly required worship amounts to an a-religious or a-theistic government.⁴⁴ Which alternative did Hobbes think superior, or better suited to an enlightened society?

Hobbes indicates the more radical (and liberal) alternative to be superior in the final chapter of *Leviathan*. Hobbes's opponents in that chapter are those believers (exemplified, but not limited to, Roman Catholics) who "pretend the kingdom of God to be of this world, and thereby to have a power [i.e., a power over the affairs of this world] therein distinct from that of the civil state."⁴⁵ But the

41. Thomas Hobbes, *Opera Philosophica quae Latine Scripsit*, ed. William Molesworth, 5 vols. (London: John Bohn, 1839), II: 128.

42. Cf. *Leviathan* XXX.14 and XXXI.41, *English Works* VII, 344–45.

43. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI: 37.

44. Even where there is public worship, control is political and thus, for Hobbes, essentially a-religious. What is crucial for Hobbes in either case is that the civil authority be supreme. The separation of church and state in the American case is first and foremost a Constitutional (i.e., civil) matter, the ultimate court of appeal for which is the Supreme Court of the state. The American solution thus satisfies the core requirement of Hobbes's statist absolutism, which politically subordinates spiritual authority to the temporal authority.

45. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVII: 34.

effects of this politically pernicious doctrine cannot be eliminated easily or quickly. The prosperity of these enemies of civil order, “together with their ambition, [has grown] to such a height as the violence thereof openeth the eyes which the wariness of their predecessors had before sealed up, and makes men by too much grasping let go all (as Peter’s net was broken by the struggling of too great a multitude of fishes), *whereas the impatience of those that strive to resist such encroachment before their subjects’ eyes were opened did but increase the power they resisted*” (emphasis added.) The “knot[s] upon [the people’s] liberty” were tied over several hundred years, and must be unraveled one step at a time, until

We are reduced to the independency of the primitive Christians, to follow Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos, every man as he liketh best. Which, if it be without contention, and without measuring the doctrine of Christ by our affection to the person of his minister . . . is perhaps the best. First, because there ought to be no power over the consciences of men but of the Word itself, working faith in every one, not always according to the purpose of them that plant and water, but of God himself, that giveth the increase. And secondly, because it is unreasonable (in them who teach there is such danger in every little error) to require of a man endued with reason of his own, to follow the reason of any other man, or of the most voices of many other men (which is little better than to venture his salvation at cross and pile).⁴⁶

Hobbesian principles are flexible enough to permit a prudent concession to the need for public religion. But Hobbes’s vision of a truly rational politics is ultimately hostile to any public role for religion.

The need for public religion is dependent, Hobbes believed, on the degree to which the subjects’ “eyes are opened.” As David Johnston puts it, “the prospects for a commonwealth as [Hobbes] envisaged it were vitally dependent upon the outcome of the struggle between superstition and enlightenment,” or upon “the possible transformation of” human beings into “rational actors.”⁴⁷ Freed from superstition, the people would also be freed from the manipulation of politically ambitious religious charlatans. The root of superstition lies in “perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes,” that is, in the “want of science.”⁴⁸ And “evil men, under pretext that God can do anything, are so bold as to say anything when it serves their turn, though they think it untrue If this superstitious fear of spirits were taken away, and with it prognostics from dreams, false prophecies, and many other things dependent thereon, by which crafty

46. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVII: 20.

47. Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 128, 129.

48. Hobbes, *Leviathan* XII: 6; XI: 17.

ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted *than they are* for civil obedience.”⁴⁹

Hobbes understood civil obedience, in contrast to obedience to “crafty ambitious persons,” to be in the interest of the people. Hobbes was a sort of champion of the people.⁵⁰ Very few human beings do not desire peace. These very few are the trouble makers, “needy men, and hardy, not contented with their present condition, as also all men that are ambitious of military command, are inclined to continue the causes of war, and to stir up trouble and sedition.”⁵¹ The vast majority desire peace owing to a “desire of ease and sensual delight” or a “fear of death and wounds.” And a few seek peace as well owing to a “desire of knowledge, and arts of peace.”⁵² The majority, the people, wish merely to be left alone, in ease and safety. Hobbes sides with the majority.

Uncivic Liberalism

Hobbes’s liberalism, then, is radically uncivic. Hobbesian politics does uphold the principle of popular self-government; but it is self-government of a paradoxically novel kind. Hobbesian government is legitimated by the consent of the people. Hobbes is often called “authoritarian” by those who ignore that it is the people who, according to Hobbesian doctrine, are in the seat of authority. Whatever those who hold sovereign power do, they do “by authority” of “those whom they represent.”⁵³ Whatever arbitrariness is inherent in sovereignty is a consequence of the arbitrariness inherent in the principle of consent. As a consequence of Hobbes’s doctrine, it is difficult to say who rules whom. The sovereign is merely the representative of the people, acting by their authority alone; so it is hard to say simply that the sovereign rules the people.⁵⁴ Yet it is precisely because the sovereign power is representative that the people are obligated to obey and have no higher appeal. It is obviously hard to say that the one who must obey another rules.⁵⁵

However that puzzle might be resolved, it is of little consequence for the people, who do not wish to rule. They wish only to be left alone, or if you prefer,

49. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II: 8; emphasis added.

50. Cf. Dietz, “Hobbes’s Subject as Citizen.”

51. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XI: 4.

52. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVI: 42; Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works*, ed. William Molesworth, 11 vols. (London: John Bohn, 1840), VII: 345.

53. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVI: 4.

54. Hobbes states that “no law can possibly be unjust, inasmuch as every man maketh by his consent, the law he is bound to keep, and which consequently must be just, unless a man can be unjust to himself” (Hobbes, *English Works*, IV: 252–53).

55. See Harvey C. Mansfield, “Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government,” *American Political Science Review* 64 (March 1971): 97–110.

to be tolerated. To remind ourselves of lesson one of Hobbes's political philosophy, the natural state for human beings is without politics. Human beings are not by nature political animals.⁵⁶ Human beings are not motivated by a concern for the common good, even where they are drawn together. They make the "social contract" and create political society for strictly private, or self-interested reasons. That private self-interest is the guiding principle of Hobbesian natural law, which points to toleration. "The laws of nature," Hobbes says, are "contained in this one sentence: Do not that to another which thou thinkest unreasonable to be done by another to thyself."⁵⁷ This is Hobbes's version of the Golden Rule, which he says "is expressed in *almost* the same words by our Savior."⁵⁸ That is, Hobbes's version is not the same as the Gospel's: "*This* is the law of the Gospel: 'whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them.' And *that* the law of all men: *quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*."⁵⁹ The Gospel's version, unlike Hobbes's, entails a positive duty toward others. Hobbes's natural law is negative, instructing us to leave others alone, or, we might say, tolerate others.

Hobbes's fellow "social contract" theorist, Locke, bases his famous doctrine of toleration on this peculiarly apolitical, not to say asocial, anthropology. In making his case for why the magistrate (and not only the magistrate) should not be trusted with spiritual authority, Locke says that not only is the magistrate "probably . . . as ignorant of the way [to salvation] as my self," but he "certainly is less concerned for my salvation than I myself am."⁶⁰ Just as no one is more concerned with my interests and preservation here on earth than I myself, so too no one is more concerned with my eternal interests and preservation. Everyone, according to both Hobbes and Locke, looks first and foremost after himself.

But in this very fact lies the natural basis of toleration. Human beings are not naturally very concerned with the welfare of others. With the exception of the trouble-making few, they are therefore naturally inclined to let each other be. That is, they are naturally inclined to toleration, if they are enlightened about their natures and feel secure enough themselves. "No man," Locke asserts, "complains of the ill management of his neighbor's affairs. No man is angry with another for an error committed in sowing his land, or in marrying his daughter."⁶¹ Why then should anyone cause an uproar if his neighbor errs in managing his or his children's souls well? If it does not do you any harm, mind your own business. "If a Roman Catholic believe that to be really the body of Christ, which another man

56. Hobbes, *De Cive*, I: 2.

57. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXVI: 13.

58. Hobbes, *De Cive*, IV: 23; emphasis added.

59. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV: 5; emphasis added; cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XV: 35.

60. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 37.

61. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 34.

calls bread, he does no injury thereby to his neighbor.”⁶² This passage recalls Jefferson’s famous, starker expression of the same thought: “The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”⁶³ Jefferson’s toleration goes hand in hand with an apparent lack of concern for his neighbor’s soul. According to Locke, it follows from this natural lack of concern for our fellows and our fellows’ lack of concern for us that “[t]he care . . . of every man’s soul belongs unto himself, and is to be left unto himself.”⁶⁴ Human beings, according to Hobbes and the early liberals at any rate, are not noble creatures, because narrowly self-interested. They are not social by nature. But they can be made sociable (if not social) and tolerant more surely than could naturally social beings.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Many liberals today find toleration as Hobbes envisioned it to be unsatisfactory, and perhaps not even truly deserving the name toleration. For Hobbes, as a philosopher of the Enlightenment, did not respect what today is called deep diversity. The very term “enlightenment” suggests that there is a correct worldview, the worldview of the modern rationalist, and that all who do not share this worldview are confused, prejudiced, or superstitious. From the perspective of many contemporary liberals, the spirit of “enlightenment” is not the spirit of toleration.⁶⁶ Thus, Rawls’s liberalism will be “political not metaphysical.”⁶⁷ That is, his liberalism will not concern itself with correct and incorrect worldviews, but will tolerate, and even respect as reasonable, all alike, provided they return the favor. Genuine toleration must be toleration of “deep diversity.”⁶⁸ Whereas the old liberals, such as Hobbes, sought conformity around

62. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 46.

63. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press [1787] 1954), 159.

64. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 35.

65. Cf. Steven Kautz, *Liberalism and Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 53. It is in the context of discussing man’s political nature that Aristotle comments that man is the “most unholy and the most savage without virtue,” see Aristotle, *Aristotelis Politica*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1253a35–36. Hobbes, in contrast, defines cruelty as the “contempt, or little sense, of the calamity of others . . . For, that any man should take pleasure in other men’s great harms without other end of his own I do not conceive it possible” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, VI: 47). When considered in terms of the human capacity for vice, Hobbes cannot be considered to have a harsher view of human nature than Aristotle.

66. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xl.

67. Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical.”

68. Rawls does distinguish, however, between “reasonable pluralism” and “pluralism as such.” See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 47–66 and J. Judd Owen, *Religion and the Demise of Liberal Rationalism: The Foundational Crisis of the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 114–17.

certain “enlightened” principles, as is evidenced in the elaborate rationalistic Biblical interpretations of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke, the new liberalism will respect a deep diversity of worldviews, and would not dream of presenting a liberal interpretation of the Bible.

Although Hobbes was not a philosopher of “deep diversity,” he was a philosopher of, if not a superficial, at any rate a natural diversity of human desires. There is no *summum bonum*. Human life is characterized by desires for an almost infinite variety of earthly goods, and there is no hierarchy among these goods. Desires differ among individuals just as they do for an individual from moment to moment. We might call this low diversity.

Hobbes does recognize a certain necessity for diversity concerning the higher things—theology in particular—as well. But he points out this diversity only to turn our attention away from it. There is, when human beings speculate about theological matters, a necessary diversity of opinion, because the divine nature is radically unknowable.⁶⁹ Such speculation is a waste of time. For, according to Hobbes, the human concern for the “highest” things is rooted in our lower earthly concerns. Without the benefit of a scientific understanding of natural causes, human beings seek to appease invisible powers through such things as worship and prayer in the hope that these invisible powers will deliver the earthly goods they naturally desire.⁷⁰ Science (technology) can deliver the natural goods far more surely than a radically unknowable God, provided political science makes possible the peace and prosperity science (technology) requires.

But what, Rawls might ask, is tolerant about asserting that religious belief is rooted in confused material self-interest? Moreover, this supposed toleration is not genuinely moral, but is instead, as Rawls puts it, a mere “modus vivendi,” an extended cease-fire among essentially self-interested and naturally conflicting parties. Rawls is, of course, concerned with a stable and peaceful political order. But if toleration rests on nothing more than mutual self-interest, “in this case we do not have stability for the right reasons, that is, as secured by a firm allegiance to a democratic society’s political (moral) ideals and values.”⁷¹ Rawls seeks

69. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI: 33, 38; Hobbes, *English Works*, IV: 231–38, 390–91, 393; cf. also Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII: 6 with Hobbes, *English Works*, VII: 184.

70. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII; The principles of the U.S. Constitution, as expressed in Federalist 10, are rooted in this aspect of Hobbes’s philosophy. Madison traces the “zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well as speculation as of practice” to the link between “[man’s] reason and his self-love” and to the “diverse faculties of men, from which the rights of property originate . . . From the protection of different and unequal faculties of acquiring property, the possession of different degrees and kinds of property immediately results; and from the influence of these on the sentiments and views of the respective proprietors ensues a division of the society into different interests and parties.” See Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

71. John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (1997): 781.

"wholehearted members of democratic society who endorse society's intrinsic political ideals and values and do not simply acquiesce in the balance of political and social forces."⁷² The new toleration is not content to live and let live. It seeks a moral disposition of the heart, one shared with the rest of society. It seeks, not mere toleration, let alone enlightenment, but a moral community.⁷³

From a Hobbesian point of view, however, such an elevated liberalism, perhaps owing precisely to its elevation, betrays a dissatisfaction with toleration. Not content to live and let live, it seeks a more substantial moral bond among people, a moral bond that cannot be reduced to mere interest. Not content that one's fellow citizens obey the law, it concerns itself with whether they obey "for the right reasons" and wholeheartedly. It is concerned, not simply with actions, or with opinions only insofar as they issue in illegal actions, but with matters of the heart. From a Hobbesian point of view, these liberals are quasi-communitarian, or even, to remain closer to Hobbes's own frame of reference, quasi-theocratic.

This is not to say that the scope of Hobbesian toleration is greater than that of contemporary liberalism, since the scope of Hobbesian toleration is so dependent on circumstances. Indeed, it is possible that Hobbes's view of human nature made him less hopeful about the scope of toleration, even in the best circumstances, than are those contemporary liberals who aspire to a community of public-spirited toleration. Be that as it may, the clearer divide between Hobbes and many contemporary liberals lies in the frank recognition of the limits of toleration and the harsh policies that may become necessary. Hobbes insists that a truly reasonable political order must be viable; it must not put itself at risk by either squeamishness or high-mindedness, however well intentioned.

Yet some sort of elevation of liberalism (beginning with Locke's emphasis on liberty) may have been required for it to become viable. Perhaps we are not apolitical beings in the way Hobbes supposed. We have to consider the possibility that Hobbes's liberalism founders on the paradox that his political science is so starkly "realistic" as to be impracticable and therefore utopian.⁷⁴ Perhaps, then, the rebellion against Hobbesian liberalism is not surprising. But if the new liberalism does represent a rebellion against liberal toleration in its original form, its rebellion may nevertheless appear mild and undramatic. Hobbes ultimately would still recognize our neoliberals as liberals, even if they do not return the favor. For they too are sure that, however much deeper the pluralism we ought to respect is, our differences are not worth fighting over. So long as peace remains imperative, and the complaisance it requires marks the moral horizon, Hobbesian liberalism lives quietly on.

72. Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 781.

73. Cf. Owen, *Religion and the Demise of Liberal Rationalism*, 121–27.

74. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI: 41.